

## **Town/Commercial Relations Committee**

### **Fiscal Year 2002**

Since its formation in 1990, the TCRC has invested most of its effort in three areas:

#### **Downtown Action Plan Implementation**

The first of these has been fulfilling the Select Board's charge to develop aspects of the 1992 Downtown Action Plan and bring them to other Town boards or Town Meeting for implementation. Many of the actions recommended in the Plan have been completed or are underway – renovation of Town Hall, Sweetser Park improvements, the Boltwood Walk parking garage, the Downtown Streetscape Design Guidelines (including construction of Phase I of the downtown sidewalk improvements), downtown bike lanes and intersection improvements.

In FY 02, as in other years, much of the TCRC's work involved supporting or working on projects in downtown Amherst. In so doing, the TCRC worked with other Town boards and committees, particularly the Parking Commission, on which a TCRC member serves as a liaison. The TCRC met twice during FY 02 with the Parking Commission, in an attempt to help the Commission develop workable policies concerning downtown delivery spaces.

At the beginning of FY 02, the TCRC was working on a proposal to find a site for a downtown visitor center. Through the Planning Department, the TCRC had engaged the services of an undergraduate class from the UMass Finance and Operations Management Department. The class conducted region-wide research into nineteen existing visitor centers in New England, undertook surveys and developed recommendations. The class presented its report in December 2001. It recommended a downtown visitor center of 1,100 to 1,900 sq. ft. near a public transit stop. The center should be open from 8:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., and include public restrooms, vending machines and an electronic information kiosk for off-hours. The center should be owned and controlled, if not necessarily operated, by the Town.

#### **Community Forum**

The second area of TCRC focus has been serving as a forum where the business community and Town government can discuss issues of mutual concern. In FY 02, the TCRC held several meetings and conducted outreach in an attempt to help the Select Board and downtown businesses deal with the increasing problem of downtown evening business hours and large, late-night gatherings by students and others

after the bars close. The TCRC held a community forum on this issue and attended Select Board meetings on the subject. The TCRC presented preliminary recommendations to the Select Board in March 2002, including: 1) that restaurants not be forced to close earlier than 2:00 a.m., 2) that no attempt be made to disperse or relocate the gatherings, 3) that assistance be sought from the downtown business community and 4) that further research be conducted on safety barriers. Work on this issue continues.

### ***Advocacy***

The third area of TCRC concern is advocacy for issues involving commerce in Amherst. In implementation of this responsibility, the TCRC reviewed articles proposed for the 2002 Annual Town Meeting warrant, and developed and published recommendations for Town Meeting on specific articles.

### ***After a Decade – A Broader Focus***

But the original mandate of the Town/Commercial Relations Committee is broader than Amherst's downtown commercial center. The original (1990) charge reads:

***The Town/Commercial Relations Committee will advise the Select Board on the needs and desires of the Amherst business community as it relates to Town regulations and by-laws, especially those relating to economic development, planning and zoning, public safety, traffic and parking. It will serve as a liaison with Amherst businesses to advise them of community interests in regard to commercial policies and practices. It will provide a forum for the discussion of issues of interest to Town government and the business community.***

In FY 02, the TCRC began to broaden its focus to once more address the interests of the Amherst business community as it interacts with the workings of Amherst Town government. The TCRC developed a Work Plan with task areas corresponding to the responsibilities of its charge: 1) serving as a community forum, 2) aiding with business development and facilitation and 3) improving commercial areas. The last category includes pursuing improvements to the downtown (under the Downtown Action Plan) and improvements to village centers and outlying commercial districts.

Principal among the TCRC's new tasks is the development of a Town-wide business survey, the better to gauge the "needs and desires of the Amherst business community." The survey will be conducted and completed in FY 03.

Barry Roberts  
Chair

